

A HERO'S STORY  
CRAIG LEE DUNNING  
MAJOR, US ARMY (RETIRED)



I am a Vietnam Veteran, and this is my story.



The Big Red One, The 1st Infantry Division. The First Cavalry Airmobile Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade,  
1<sup>st</sup> Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, 1<sup>st</sup> Squad



National Defense Service Medal

Good Conduct Medal

Vietnam Service Medal

Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal



After his recovery,  
Craig Lee Dunning, Major US Army.  
Dictated his memories  
to Carolyn Petterson  
who produced his first copy.

Robert N. Smith researched and correlated  
dates  
(as much as possible) and added photos to the  
second copy.

So many others who love and honor the Major  
have helped create  
this acknowledgment of a Hero.

# My Vietnam Engagements

These maps are included for orientation purposes.

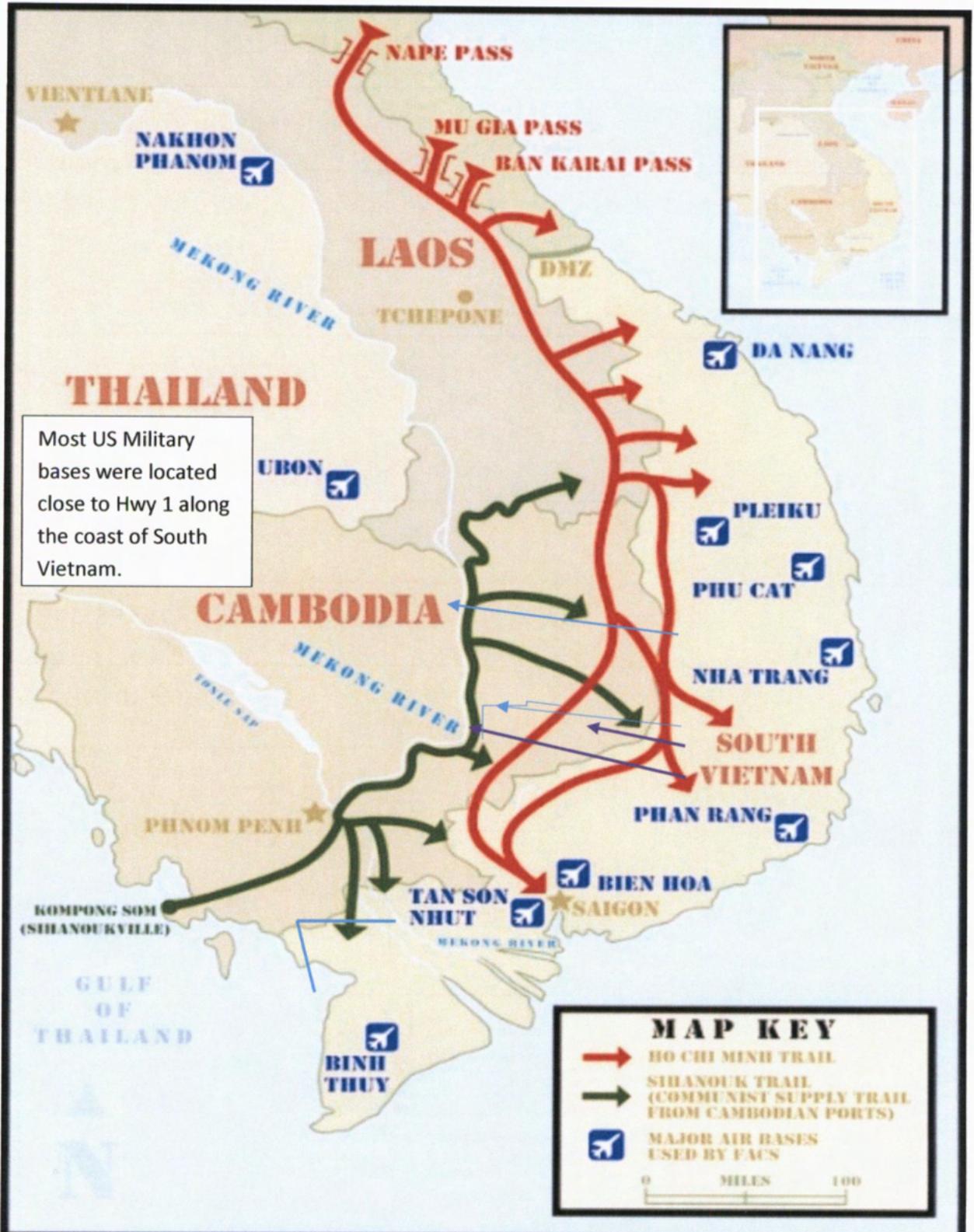
In 1967, I arrived in Kha ( Khanh Hoa) at the Bien Hoa Air Base.

In November 1967, a helicopter pilot reported Vietcong movements  
We were sent out on a seek-and-destroy mission. That was my first combat  
engagement.



*This map shows the four primary areas in which I was involved.*

- 4 Thien Hue Province  
Bastion Khe Sanh  
Marine Base (pg 26)  
and Hwy 9 above DMZ
- 3 opening part of Hwy.1  
(pg 25)
- 2 Phan Thiet (pg 21 & 22)
- 1 Bien Hoa Air Base (pg 9)







## CHAPTER 1

I was born in Rescue, Virginia, right out of nowhere. My parents were Mr. Craig Dunning & Mrs. Margy Turner Dunning. My mama and daddy told me that the most important thing that ever happened was when her baby boy was born on June 17. 1946, as soon as she saw that cute little face, it brought a smile and joy to her heart. She told me that Daddy smiled and said, "I'll be back.". When he returned, he brought a toy shotgun to take his son out hunting.

When I was ten years old in 1956, my family and I moved to Suffolk, Virginia. Shortly after that, my father passed away. Life sometimes gets rough, but time keeps ticking, so we moved on.

By the time I got to High School, I had discovered that I excelled in Mathematics, and was quite interested in mechanical engineering. After graduating from Suffolk, VA., public high school in 1964, I was excited to continue my engineering education, from 1964 through 1966. Two weeks after I got my ASEM degree (Associate of Science in Mechanical Engineering), I joined the Army, instead of being drafted, in Mid-November 1966; I was 18 years old; that is a date I would like to forget. That is when I decided that I would not volunteer for anything! Ever again!

Knowing what I know now, I wish I had just volunteered for duty in the Air Force.

The Army ordered me to Fort Bragg, NC, on November 17, 1966, for eight weeks of basic training as a private (E-1). 

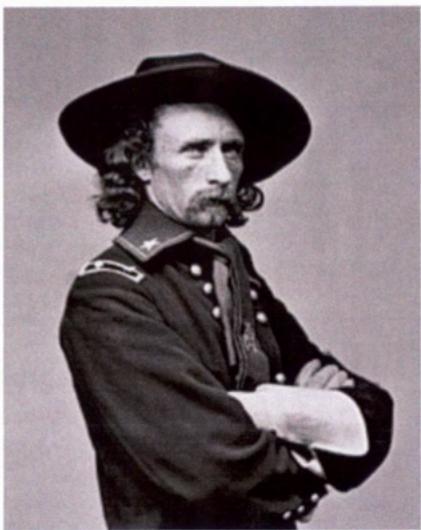
After the Korean War, Fort Bragg continued to expand; by the onset of hostilities in Vietnam, Fort Bragg was one of the largest bases in the Army. Over 200,000 draftees and volunteers in the Army, throughout the Vietnam War, received basic training at Fort Bragg. That was my idea of Hell (but I hadn't been to Vietnam yet).

Marching and crawling in the mud or dusty soil in sweat-soaked helmets and fatigues, while carrying a heavy M-14 rifle; was terrible. Add a backpack, scorching heat, and a canteen of warm water (not enough to drink), pushing us to our limits. Add a sadistic drill sergeant who had been screaming at you for eight weeks; it was a living hell.

Need I say more? That is where they teach you to get off your ass, get on your feet, and MOVE OUT.

When I finished boot camp on January 12, 1967, I was promoted to private second class (E-2).

The Army told me to report for infantry duty in South Carolina by January 26, 1967. I had never been so worried in all my 18 years, and I was going to fight in a war that I did not understand. Following my infantry training, I received orders to report to the Big Red One Unit in Vietnam while at home. I didn't know what that was, but I soon learned it had a long history in the early United States Calvary divisions. 



The 7<sup>th</sup>. Cavalry was formed in 1866.

Custer was recognized as a Cavalry Leader, and at 23, he was promoted to Brigadier General. He fought in the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the American Indian War. His last battle has been called Custer's last stand of Little Big Horn, June 1876.



### George Armstrong Custer

The 7th Cavalry traded their horses for tanks and became part of the 1st Cavalry Division in the 1920s to fight in the Pacific Theater of World War II. It extended through World War 1 & 2, Korea, And into Vietnam. Along the way, they added helicopters Inhasing their mobility. Their motto was: ***no mission too difficult, no sacrifice too great, Duty 1<sup>st</sup>.*** They were the most prepared and were the first to be deployed, so they led the way in July 1965, and were there until 1970, five years later. The 1<sup>st</sup>. Infantry Division was one of the first to defend the Republic of Vietnam. The Big Red One fought the main forces of the Viet Cong (VC) and regular North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces. They set up their headquarters northwest of Saigon. That is where I figured that was where I was going.



I finally left Suffolk, Virginia. That was the first time I had ever been on an airplane. It was a little scary and exciting, all that noise, feeling the plane moving faster and faster; then came the dizzy feeling in the stomach and the popping

of the ears and hearing again. As the airplane settled down, it seemed to float with the hum of the engines as I drifted off into sleep.

I woke up as the airplane landed in Washington, D. C. To my surprise, it had been snowing and getting deep. Like a lot of other things in Washington. A Blizzard hit the area on January 26-28, 1967, dropping 3.5 feet of snow and building up to about 23.5 feet in snow banks. We were held over for three days because the weather was so bad.

Three days later, we finally left Washington, DC. Flying to California, then Hawaii, I reached my final destination, **Vietnam**. That was in February, 1967. I was getting used to flying, but life was constantly changing. A new chapter was about to unfold into an adventure that no man nor woman should want to befall them, nor any of their children.

## CHAPTER 2

I was alone in **Kha (Khanh Hoa)**, reporting to my unit. **The Big Red One**.



They had already left the base on a mission into the field. In the meantime, the Army told me to report to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division until my unit returned in two weeks. Being a military man, I reported in, and they assigned me the most shitty job. “Go to the back of all the houses, drag the half fifty-five-gallon drum out into the open, and put gasoline in them to burn the human waste.” It was a crappy job. It stunk, you stunk, and everyone that did that job stunk. People who saw you coming moved to the other side of the



street. The only friends you had were other crap-burners. We joined the Army to fight the enemies. But they didn't issue us a gun – I wonder why? I do not know which job was the worst; they all stunk and upset your stomach.

I had to wait for the **First Cavalry Air Mobile Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, 1<sup>st</sup> Squad** (If you could say all of that without stumbling, you knew you were in the Army). That is when I would get my M-16 rifle. It was, and still is, considered one of the best assault rifles in the world.



Man, I was so happy to see that! I was issued my M-16 rifle and my ammo belt. But the best part was that I didn't have to burn more human waste. I had a week to bathe and get the stink off my body and clothes, as I settled on with my new squad in the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. I had the job of carrying their ammo for the M-60 machine gun group one. That was the lowest job you could get on a platoon, but it was much better than burning crap.

Sometime along the line, I was promoted to (E-3).

I was almost getting used to this new life. Watching the sun poke its head above the crimson horizon like a ball of fire exploding off in the distance, with bright rays of red and orange beams of light, painted dark clouds with a beautiful golden rim waiting to be touched.

Low-lying fog covered the ground like a baby's swaddling cloth. The trees seemed to poke through the misty cloud, creating a ghostly array of patterns that soothed the soul. As you took a deep breath and released it, your mind would be absorbed in the tranquil beauty.

About eighty of us were fully dressed and ready on one of those mornings, waiting. Off in the distance, we could hear a hum getting closer as the sound changed into that unforgettable whump-whump-whump sound a mile away; we all knew it was the helicopter coming to reach us. It was a sound that drove a spear of fear into your heart, or brought about a cry of relief, "Thank God! They haven't forgotten - they are here to pick us up".

All the guys who come home remember the Huey helicopter as an angel that extracted them from Hell.

The Huey gunships had a nomenclature based on their armament. "Frogs" carried grenade launchers on the helicopter's nose. "Hogs" or "heavies" carried large rocket pods. "Guns" or "lights" were fitted with various configurations in the fuselage, and pod-mounted machine guns, miniguns, and smaller rocket launchers.

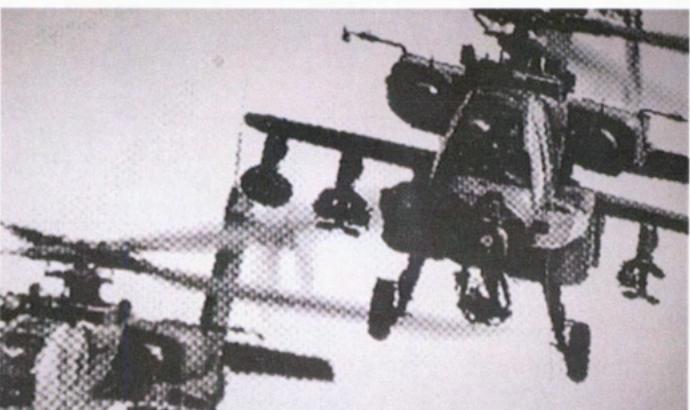
They brought war's wrath down on the enemy's heads when configured for battle, delivering the message, "Don't mess with our boys!"



The Huey used to transport troops and supplies was referred to as a “slick” because it only had door guns and no external weapons mounted on its sides, resulting in a fuselage with a smooth, “slick” surface.

As the helicopter got closer, the roar got louder, and the swirling propellers created a sound of au-wumpa--au wumpa; once you heard it, you could never forget it. It grabbed the misty fog and slung it around, and it looked

like an angel arriving to take you home in a heavenly chariot. As our minds were absorbing that glorious view, we heard the loud, robust and solemn voice of the Platoon leaders that brought our senses back to instant



reality. “All right, soldiers, MOVE OUT.”

Eighty soldiers scrambled in two rows, like well-oiled gears, into that chariot of the gods. It lifted off the ground, tilted its head down, and moved forward. It didn't get very high; it just slipped over the tops of the trees. We were skipping across that frog pond, leaping over the trees. It felt like we were on a roller coaster ride. At first, it was a little woozy, and then it became fun. Some of the men were yelling into the high hum of the helicopter, laughing and playfully punching each other. Then everything got quiet as the helicopter started to swirl around, and we knew we were about to land. They put us down in a clear rice patty, surrounded by trees on three sides. The enemy was fortified, dug in, and ready - waiting. There we were, right in the middle of it. We, too, were prepared and ready as we could be.

Upon landing, our company came under intense automatic weapons and mortar fire from all around us. They launched a heavy barrage of shells that sounded like we were in the middle of the most enormous, loudest thunderstorm in the middle of a hurricane. It was so loud that you couldn't hear yourself think; you just responded with the instincts drilled into our heads during basic training.

Soldiers were falling all around us, some from being hit; others were diving for cover to fight back. We fired into the tree lines because we could see the flashes from their weapons, and we knew the enemy was there. Our weapons were getting so hot from firing that you could not touch them. The fighting went on for what felt like an eternity. Someone called the helicopter

gunship for artillery fire and airstrikes. Seeing them delivering their mighty blows repeatedly throughout the night was a relief.

There were many wounded fellow soldiers all over the rice paddy. We could send a few men out during nighttime, under the gunfire, and bring the wounded to a safe area. After the helicopter gunships finished their mission, we found 119 enemies wounded and 289 more killed. We lost 22, and 12 more were wounded. My M-60 machine gunner, Corporal (E-4) James M. Walker, was killed, and I was shot in the arm. I didn't think it was bad, but the medic cleaned the area, put some cream on it, wrapped it with a bandage, and gave me some pain pills.

I was promoted to corporal (E-4) and was now carrying the M-60 machine gun. I had wished for it.



Now I had it. Now I wish I was back burning human waste. You would think that I would stop wishing.

That was my first enemy attack and my first (1) Purple Heart;

November 25, 1967.



That was not the first medal I wanted to get. Nobody does.

Far too often, it is the last one A soldier receives.

# *National Purple Heart Hall of Honor*



**Branch of Service**

**US Army**

**Date of Incident**

**11/25/1967**

**Conflict** Vietnam

**1957-1975**

**Rank**

**Specialist 4<sup>th</sup>**



**1<sup>st</sup>**

**Class**

**Craig Lee Dunning**  
**Unit B Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 7th Cavalry**

***Status: Wounded in Action***

## Chapter 3

After a while, we returned to the landing zone; the wounds healed, and we had a little time to ourselves while we waited for a new Captain and more men.



The new Captain had a bubble helicopter to go out and find the GOOKS; that was what we called the North Vietnamese enemy. The helicopter would come back, pick up seven soldiers and return, skipping over the treetops. It was becoming a lot of fun riding that helicopter roller coaster. They would set us down in the rice paddy to go out and kill the GOOKS that the bubble helicopter had found. We did this for three months, and did not lose one man.

By this time, I was walking point. Now that is not the safest place to be. You were alone, out in front of the squad. You were an open target. You had to keep your mind on where you were walking. You had to keep your eyes open for booby traps. Those GOOKS were good at setting and hiding those traps. The only thing they were better at was disguising themselves. If you weren't careful, you might step on one of them.

The one thing I hated most was walking in the water. Leeches would get on you and bury their heads into your flesh. You wouldn't know they were there until they sucked enough of your blood. The only way to get rid of them was to light up a cigarette, take a big puff until it glowed from the heat, then touch the leach's body, which caused them to pull its head out of your flesh. You didn't want to try to pull them out, that would break the head off in your skin, and then you would have a severe problem. You had to burn them off, one at a time, until all of them were gone.

While on one of those point excursions, I found a booby trap hidden in the bushes. I gently took a grenade, pulled the pin, threw it into the bushes, and took off running, but I didn't run fast enough; the shrapnel was faster than me. I looked back just as it caught up with me, hit me in the face, broke my jaw in three places, and broke most of my teeth. As they loaded me onto the Medevac helicopter, I said: "Here I go again".

Note about awards and medals:

Each Rank or Rate not only reflected your professional capacity but also reflect your degree of military leadership. If someone was

killed, or the Army needed someone to fill a higher Rank or Rate, they chose someone in the field and gave them a field promotion. This method ensured that the Army was always ready.

You were automatically given a Purple Heart if you were wounded in action.

Almost all awards were given unceremoniously in the field.

I stayed in the hospital tent for two weeks. I had a tough time eating after that. Here came my (2<sup>nd</sup>. Purple Heart.  They even gave me my (1<sup>st</sup>) Bronze Star for saving my squadron from an ambush. That wasn't what I wanted; I wanted my teeth back, but what the  Hell? You do what you have to do.

From this point in my life, everything ran on automatic, with two priorities: survival and concern for my crew. The love between us is more vital and profound than any blood ties. Our lives depended on each other to cover our backs, even to death. We saw so many gross, horrible, repulsive acts of war that the mind refused to recall them, protecting our sanity and removing those memories. You pray they stay away forever, but too often, they flash through the mind, creating mental havoc and wrecking our families. That has been defined as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

We would receive our orders daily, pack food, water, and ammunition, head out on foot, in a helicopter, and sometimes atop a tank into the very pits of Hell.

Another thing I didn't like about walking over there was getting jungle rot in my arm. I think that is how I was exposed to Agent Orange, which gave me Parkinson's disease.

Life seems to go in cycles. So here we go again. We went back into the landing zone for five days and nights. We had to stand watch for three hours and sleep for three hours. That was hard on how the mind works. When it came time to sleep, you spent most of that time worrying that you would be overtaken at any time. After five days, we were glad to see the helicopter come to pick us up.

## Chapter 4

We settled down to something like a routine that could change at a moment's notice, but it was a routine. We (about seven men) would go out for about three weeks. We walked through thickly wooded areas looking for villages. During our recon, we found seven villages. We would check for traps. The first tunnel we discovered was open; I stood there like a dumb-ass and got shot in my arm by a GOOK. I thought it was not bad. The medic cleaned the area, put some cream on it, and wrapped it again with bandages. Once again, here came my (3<sup>rd</sup>) Purple Heart.



I thought I would have to stop getting these, because the odds would catch up with me, and that one, would be my last. After that, we started checking the area a lot closer. If we did not find anything that looked like GOOKS had been in the area but found tunnels, we would go down into the tunnel (where rats lived). If we then saw something that looked as if GOOKS had been in the area, we would throw grenades into the tunnel. We ended up killing 83 GOOKS this way.

Another day, another routine. The helicopter came and picked us up and tried to set us down in the An Lno Valley. Some of us had to rappel down a rope to the ground. Usually, a soldier can rappel down 50 feet of rope in 4 to 6 seconds, but if shot at, they can do it so quickly you would be unable to count fast enough.

It was not difficult to contact the enemy; they were well dug in and prepared. The valley surrounded us. When nightfall came, the routine, without questioning, was that able men would crawl on their hands and knees under enemy fire, searching for wounded men and dragging them back to a safe zone. We found a big room with six dead North Vietnam soldiers. Then, we found another tunnel that was so small that only one person could slither through. Here I go again;

I guess I was trying to be a macho hero, because I went in alone and crawled until I found another big room, where I saw three North Vietnamese



and took them as prisoners. I made them crawl out to the waiting American soldiers. I also found two American prisoners; shot, naked, but alive; so, I pulled them out of that would-be grave. The Army awarded me my (1<sup>st</sup> ) Silver Star for rescuing the American prisoners. On that trip, we accounted for



226 dead North Vietnamese. We only lost 24 men. The helicopter came and picked us up, and dropped us off at a landing zone where we could get some hot food and a shower. Oh, what a relief that was.

I was promoted to Sergeant (E-5) and became a Squad Leader. I was having so much trouble with my M-16 jamming, that I obtained a 12-gauge shotgun and a pistol. I felt a whole lot safer with the shotgun. It reminded me of that toy that my dad had given me.

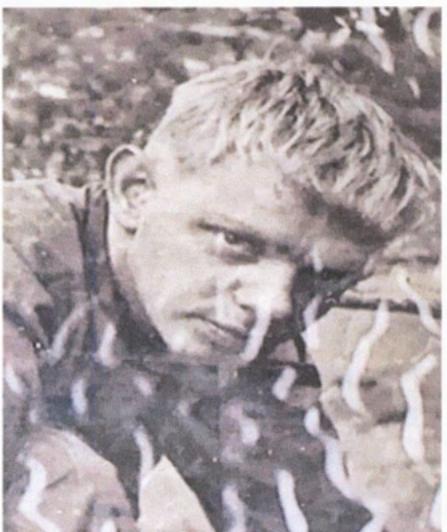
Two days later, the helicopter picked up our company and took us about 100 miles north to **Phan Thiet**. When we arrived, the company assigned us to small groups for quick and dirty encounters. Company C came upon a North Vietnam Army position. After seven hours of close-in fighting, we counted 371 North Vietnamese dead. We lost three, and six were wounded. Again I was shot,

this time in the leg. The medic cleaned the area, wrapped it, and said I would have to return to the landing zone. The Medevac Helicopter picked us up and took us to the hospital tent. The medic put eight stitches in my leg wound. The next day I went back to be with the men.

I received my (4<sup>th</sup>) Purple Heart, and they gave me my (2<sup>nd</sup>)  
Bronze Star  for saving my squad  
from  an ambush.



## Chapter 5



I liked going out with a platoon more than in a company-sized unit. We were out for six weeks and, sadly' lost two men and had three wounded. One of the men killed was my point man, David F. Pete. David got shot in the head. To say I was sad is an understatement. He was my good friend; he saved my squad three times.



Those were the most heart-wrenching moments I had ever experienced. You would have had have been there to know how hard it is to see your friend lying there

motionless. I put him in for his second Bronze Star.

The next time we went out, we sat on the tanks. We would go into villages and towns, tearing up half of the place. We called it "dethroning". It was something we did not like to do. We would tear up anything that looked suspicious. Some of the people were little ones; but we had to dethrone the bad ones, to help the good ones. The only words that came to us were "GOD FORGIVE US".

The Army promoted me to platoon leader Sergeant (E-7), skipping over (E6). I did not like getting promoted that way; God was watching over me. I could only thank God for letting me live to get it.

After that, some of us volunteered to be tunnel rats. I opened the first tunnel we found, then, like a macho dummy, I stood there. I was getting shot at, but they missed me. God must have been working overtime. They could not find anyone that wanted to stay in that job anymore.

The Army promoted me to First Lieutenant (O-2) Platoon leader.

On August 25, 1966, the Second of the Seventh Cavalry Battalion was moved north 150 miles to [Phan Thiet \(Phan Thiet\)](#) to commence Operation BYRD.

Operation Byrd was a security operation conducted during the Vietnam War by the US 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Task Force, and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The 44t Regiment, Binh Thuan Province, South Vietnam, operated jointly from August 26, 1966, to December 1, 1967. (1 year and four months). It was the country's most extensive, and only independent, American Battalion-size force. Most of the fighting during BYRD was with small units in quick and dirty encounters, but in October, Company C encountered two platoons of the North Vietnamese Army, spotted from the air. After six hours of close support and aerial rocket artillery, 487 North Vietnamese Army regulars were dead. It was the most significant single engagement of the operation. We lost three Medevac helicopters.

We found a mountain with North Vietnamese soldiers on it. We killed 197, and took the hill. I thought we took it for a new landing zone, but we left the next day. The North Vietnamese came back.

## Chapter 6



We were taken back to the landing zone and given two weeks of R&R in Hong Kong. That was a lovely place, the people were good to Americans, and I had a perfect time there. When I flew back to Vietnam, we landed on an American airbase and stayed for one night. I could not believe the bread they had there. It was better than the bread I had on R&R. Again, I wished I had volunteered for the Air Force. Here I go wishing again.

When I got back, I discovered that my First Lieutenant Platoon Leader, platoon sergeant (E-7), and another good friend, Frank M. Peterson, were all killed. I sent a letter to Frank's wife, telling her how sorry I was, and how good a friend he was. Frank had a great attitude about life. I got a letter that saying he had told her how great it would be for the three of us to meet, back in the good old USA.

At the **beginning of 1968**, my Division requested that I volunteer for one more year. They said, "If I would, they would put me in a safe landing zone", promoting me to a **Major (0-4)**, skipping over **Captain**.

My Colonel had two Huey helicopters with 30 men in each of them. Neither helicopter had a gunship on it. One of the helicopters was shot down, and all 30 men died.

They had me sitting at a desk listening to my two Companies on the radio. I wouldn't say I liked doing that. I felt like I was wasting my time, so I went to my Colonel and requested to go out in the field with my men.

The Battalion was still an independent task force in operations BYRD in the II Corps Zone, pitted against an estimated two North Vietnam Army Battalions. The 2<sup>nd</sup>. Battalions, 7<sup>th</sup>. Calvary crushed the insurgent and opened **Highway 1**, a vital link to Saigon. We had a kill number of 400 Vietnamese.

The Army told us to walk the road again and look for American bodies. I know exactly how many we found. We had to remove Vietnamese bodies to find them, and I had to open every body bag. We found 146 dead and 50 wounded Americans; When the Battalion left the location to rejoin the Division, convoys could travel from Saigon to Hue without incident for the first time in a decade. Local troops could contain them.

## Chapter 7

In the Marine **Bastion Khe Sanh**, the Owen battalion-initiated **Operation Pegasus** launched air assaults into the region to control **Highway 9**. At the beginning of the drive toward the beleaguered camp, we ran into a North Vietnam Army unit entrenched in foxholes and well-fortified. Failure to dislodge the enemy with tube artillery and ARA, we lost many men. So, we called the unique First Cavalry Air mobility helicopter gunships to come and help us. After

they had done their job, we looked around the area to ensure that it was clear. We found nine tunnels with North Vietnam Army men, so we threw hand grenades into them and confirmed that the area was clear. We had a North Vietnamese Army kill count of around 400. We received **Bronze Stars**

(# 4) for me.



Helicopters picked us up and took us back to a safe landing zone to regroup with more men. We stayed there for four days. The worst thing I had to do was open the body bags and identify the remains. That is the grossest and heart, mind, and soul-wrenching, that no one should endure. After more than 45 years, the memory still floods my mind. All I can do is pray to God: please, PLEASE, LET ME FORGET!

## Chapter 8

### *The Beginning of the End*

We heard that President Johnson was getting frustrated with the war, and the noise from the protesters at home. He began looking for ways to stop, or get out of, the war. He was trying to negotiate peace; but that effort faced stiff opposition from North Vietnam.

There was an informal truce in Vietnam, declared by the Pope and agreed upon by all sides. In celebration of the **Lunar New Year** called the **Tet Holiday**,

which occurred on January 31. Everyone was looking forward to that short reprieve; well, almost everyone; the North Vietnamese had something else up their sleeves.

In preparation for their surprise, they attacked several locations on isolated American garrisons in the highlands, and Laotian and Cambodian frontiers, distracting the Americans' attention.

The repositioning of US and South Vietnamese soldiers had already begun. *Operation Jeb Stuart* was part of *Operation Checkers*. It was meant to increase the number of maneuver battalions to support the besieged Marines at **Khe Sanh Combat Base**, and defeat any other attacks across the DMZ.

**Operation Checkers** began on January 21, 1968. General Westmoreland ordered General John J. Tolson to move the **1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division**, to relieve the 3rd Marine Regiment. He also moved the **3rd Brigade** to Camp Evans, to relieve the 1st Marine Regiment, to replace the **2nd Brigade** which was involved in **Operation Pershing**. General Tolson was also given operational control of the **2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division**, which flew into Phu Bai Combat Base from III Corps. When all three brigades had been deployed, Westmoreland instructed Tolson to commence **Operation Jeb Stuart** to locate and destroy PAVN units operating in Base Areas 101 and 114 to the west of **Quang Tri City and Hue**.



(Men of the Division deplane at Phu Bai during the unit's movement to Camp Evans, January 22, 1968).

On January 22, the **1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division**, commanded by Colonel Donald V. Rattan, began deploying by helicopter to **Quang Tri**. He established his headquarters

**Landing Zone Betty**, two kilometers south of **Quang Tri**, with the bulk of his force at **LZ Sharon**, another kilometer south, to launch attacks on Base Area 101 roughly 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) to the southwest.

On January 23, 1968, the **2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division**, commanded by Col. John H. Cushman, began arriving at **Landing Zone El Paso**, where Cushman established his temporary headquarters. While the **2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment** remained to defend **LZ El Paso**, Col. Cushman sent his **1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment**, to **LZ Betty** on January 27 to protect the facility, while the **1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry** conducted an operation against Base Area 101. On January 30, Cushman sent his **1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment**, to **LZ Jane**, 10km southeast of **Quang Tri**

near Highway 1 and Hai Lang town, to assist the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry in operations against Base Area 101.

On January 25, the 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, commanded by Col. James O. McKenna, began arriving at LZ El Paso and was then moved by helicopter and truck to Camp Evans.

The US and South Vietnamese forces established the Stewart Operation to respond aggressively to those attacks. The Tet offensive was a significant part of the Stewart Operation.

On January 31, 1968, North Vietnam attacked more than 100 targets in South Vietnam. They launched a series of artillery bombardments, on one of their primary targets, the *US Marine garrison* at Khe Sanh, located near Hwy 1 and Hwy 9 near Hoe, in the northernmost part of South Vietnam, just below the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone).

More than 120 attacks were carried out in less than 24 hours on cities, towns, government buildings, US and South Vietnamese military bases, and the US Embassy in Saigon.

Early on, the Viet Cong soldiers had a list of South Vietnamese that had helped the US, conducted house-by-house search, and brutally killed them. They buried thousands in mass graves, and sent videos, to be broadcast worldwide, of others with hands tied behind their backs and forced to their knees, then shot at point blank range.

On the night of 30-31 January, the PAVN and Vietcong (VC) launched their Tet Offensive, attacking targets across South Vietnam.

### **Battle of Quang Tri**

In Quang Tri, the PAVN 812th Regiment (reinforced) of the 324th Division and the VC 814th Main Force Battalion, attacked the city at 02:00 on January 31. It launched mortar and sapper attacks on LZ Betty, LZ Sharon, and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) La Vang Base. Col. Rattan redeployed his forces from Base Area 101, landing behind the PAVN forces attacking the LZs and La Vang, and cutting off their line of retreat. Meanwhile, ARVN forces inside Quảng Tri counterattacked, driving the PAVN from the city by February 1.

The Battle of Quảng Tri was a U.S./ARVN victory, with the PAVN/VC losing an estimated 914 soldiers killed and 86 captured.

Following the battle, the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry, resumed its operations against Base Area 101.

On the night of January 31, the PAVN/VC launched a mortar attack on Camp Evans, which caused an ammunition dump to explode, disabling most of the helicopters of the 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion.

Other attacks along **Highway 1** damaged or destroyed 20 bridges, and 26 culverts, between the **Hai Van Pass** and **Phu Bai**, and **Highway 1** was closed to convoy traffic until early March.

On February 1, 1968, III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) Commander General Robert Cushman alerted MG Tolson to be ready to deploy **the 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division**, into a sector west of Huế. Tolson's plan called for an air assault by two battalions of **the 3rd Brigade** northwest of Hue; the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry was to arrive in the landing zone first, followed by the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, to attack in a southeasterly direction. The two battalions would then attempt to close the enemy supply line into Hue.

Mid-afternoon on February 2, 1968, the **2/12th Cavalry** arrived in a landing zone about 6 miles (10 km) **northwest of Hue**. The Cavalry force soon encountered two dug-in PAVN Battalions around Que Chu and La Chu villages, which they could not overcome, as fog prevented their usual gunship support. **The 2/12th Cavalry** withdrew to a night defensive perimeter. Still, at dawn on February 3, following a mortar barrage, the PAVN attacked their position, and the attack was only beaten back with heavy artillery fire. Losses continued to mount throughout the day from mortar and small arms fire. That night, the Battalion commander decided to break out from the encirclement by a night march to an ARVN hilltop, where they could be resupplied, and the casualties Medevacked. **The 2/12th Cavalry** dug in and held position for the next four days.

On February 8, **the 5/7th Cavalry** began moving southwest from PK-17 towards La Chu, while the **2/12th Cavalry** was ordered to retrace their route to form the southern pincer for an attack on the PAVN stronghold. As **the 5/7th Cavalry** approached Que Chu, the command and control helicopter was shot

down the anti-aircraft fire; the crew was rescued by a dustoff helicopter. Company B then walked into an ambush **north of Que Chu** and was pinned down in the open with little cover; they could only withdraw after calling in close artillery support. Company D was also engaged by PAVN in the village of **Lieu Coc** and forced to flee. The 1/7th Cavalry then dug into night defensive positions. On February 9, the 5/7th Cavalry resumed their advance with artillery support from PK-17 and offshore naval gunfire; they overran **Lieu Coc**, finding PAVN bodies and fighting positions. As they moved closer to **La Chu**, PAVN resistance increased, and it was obvious that this was a significant PAVN base. The 5/7th Cavalry would be stalled **north of La Chu** for two weeks, probing but failing to penetrate the PAVN defenses.

On February 16, deputy COMUSMACV General Creighton Abrams flew into PK-17 for a meeting with General Tolson, where Abrams expressed his displeasure at the Cavalry's slow progress. Following this visit, 2 more cavalry Battalions (the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, and the 2nd Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment) and additional air and artillery support were committed to the attack on **La Chu**.

On February 21, 1968, following intensive radar-guided airstrikes artillery strikes, the four Cavalry battalions launched a four-pronged attack from the North, West, and South on **Que Chu** and **La Chu**. While the PAVN strongly defended the perimeter, once the Cavalry forces broke through with the support of two newly arrived M42 Dusters, they found that the base had been primarily abandoned, while the Cavalry had been building up their forces for

the attack. The Cavalry had finally captured the PAVN's main support base but were still 8 km from the Citadel. **The 3rd Brigade** would not reach the west wall of the Citadel until February 25, 1968, by which time the PAVN/VC had successfully withdrawn from the battlefield. It was estimated that *it would have taken at least 16 battalions to establish an effective cordon around Hue*; at this time, there were only 30 battalions available in all of I Corps.

The 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and the newly deployed 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, under Operation Carentan, gradually took over the Jeb Stuart area from the 1st Cavalry as it prepared for Operation Pegasus, the relief of *Khe Sanh*. We constantly moved around to any place they needed our help and support.

*Operation Jeb Stuart was terminated on March 31, 1968.*

## Chapter 9

Furious fighting during the Vietnam War was going on all around us. Thousands of tons of bombs were dropped, and an untold number of rockets and missiles were launched; it was like all of the New Year's fireworks around the world going off at the same time in your backyard. All rifles were fired across enemy lines, with hand-to-hand fighting everywhere. It was unbelievable. **Fight or die! Kill or be killed! It was real. It meant survival!**

In May 1968, the Battalion participated in **Operation Stuart**, and returned to unfinished business in Thua Thien Province, near Hue and the DMZ. The helicopter was setting us down in an opening, but we came under fire and had to rappel down a rope. The gates of Hell opened up, and we fell in.



After that, I don't remember anything—  
until 4 ½ years later, my mind started working again.

They told me I was in a hospital because I was shot in the back. Oops, my



5<sup>th</sup> Purple Heart. Seven months later, the doctor asked how I was doing. I told him I was over the craziness but didn't know why the politicians would not end the war.

Within three weeks, I was in the process of being discharged. When asked if I was retired, I would reply, "No, they fired me". The doctor told me what I had been through, and what he had to do to me. He told me I had been shot in the back as I was rappelling down the rope from the helicopter, and fell 25 feet

to the ground, hit my head on a rock which cracked my skull and scrambled my brain. He told me the Army brought me back to the Good Old USA, and I had been on life support for eight months.

It was over for me; well, almost over. I still get lapses of memory or flashbacks that I wish would stay lost, but they keep coming back. Sometimes I find myself crying like a baby, not knowing why. Other times I feel pain and depression so intensely, yet I don't know where it came from or why they do.

I met many new friends who helped me deal with the after-effects. The most painful was being called a child killer; I NEVER KNOWINGLY KILLED ANY CHILDREN, UNLIKE THOSE *ABORTION CHILD-KILLERS* OF TODAY, who dared to condemn me. May God forgive us all for our shortcomings.

I consider myself lucky; NO, I think myself blessed by God for watching over me, and allowing me to survive. He guided all those men that crawled on their hands and knees under fire to rescue the wounded. He directed the hands of all those medics and doctors who, despite awful conditions, dedicated themselves to helping the injured; he guided those pilots and gunners who ran to help those who needed their help, and with no fear for their own lives, they were compelled to help. There are many that I would like to thank personally. But there were so many, so I thank God for blessing you. Finally, despite my shortcomings, I am blessed to have friends who love me. An old Jewish word seems to wrap it all up, "*B'sharet*" which means – "It was meant to be".

## Chapter 10

### My Opinion About The War In Vietnam

Officers from CS asked me for my opinions about the Vietnam War, I replied as follows.

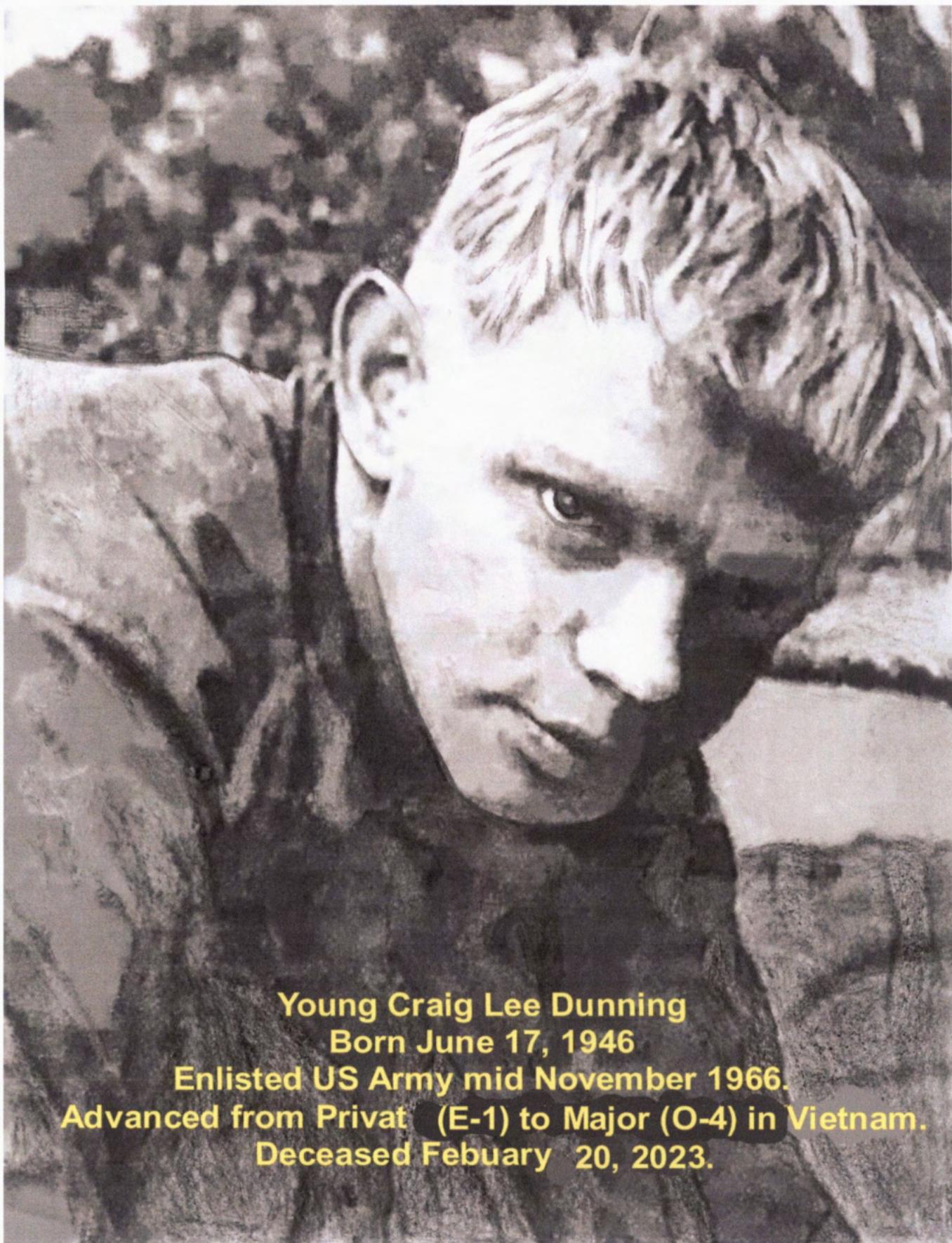
I wish they would let me have the same smooth men I had with me. They were more streetwise, acutely conscious of self-preservation, and acted instinctively to danger. That is a natural reaction I refer to as "smooth". They make excellent officers, more useful in combat than the ones you sent me. I can trust them to make the right decisions; to keep the men under my command safe. That is what every good officer wants; with God's help, they would make it back alive. They deserve that from you. Like me, many men were drafted and did what they were told to do; we did not understand that war, nor why we were there. We knew that we had to do what we did to stay alive.

I know I can count on God's help. I wish I could have relied on the prominent, fat politicians in Washington, DC, sitting on their fat asses making all the wrong decisions, justifying getting more American fighting men killed. That was a Big!! BIG!! mistake on their behalf. Perhaps, God will pay them back in the long run, for trying to keep the job they didn't deserve. I can see them sitting in Hell with the Devil.

If the right people had been there in the first place, many bright American people would still be alive today. Most of the men that gave their lives because of that war were young men. They would be living with their

families, where they should be, instead of dead, in a box, in a country, they knew nothing about—fighting in a war they didn't understand.

May God Hold Them  
In His Loving Embrace,  
Forever.



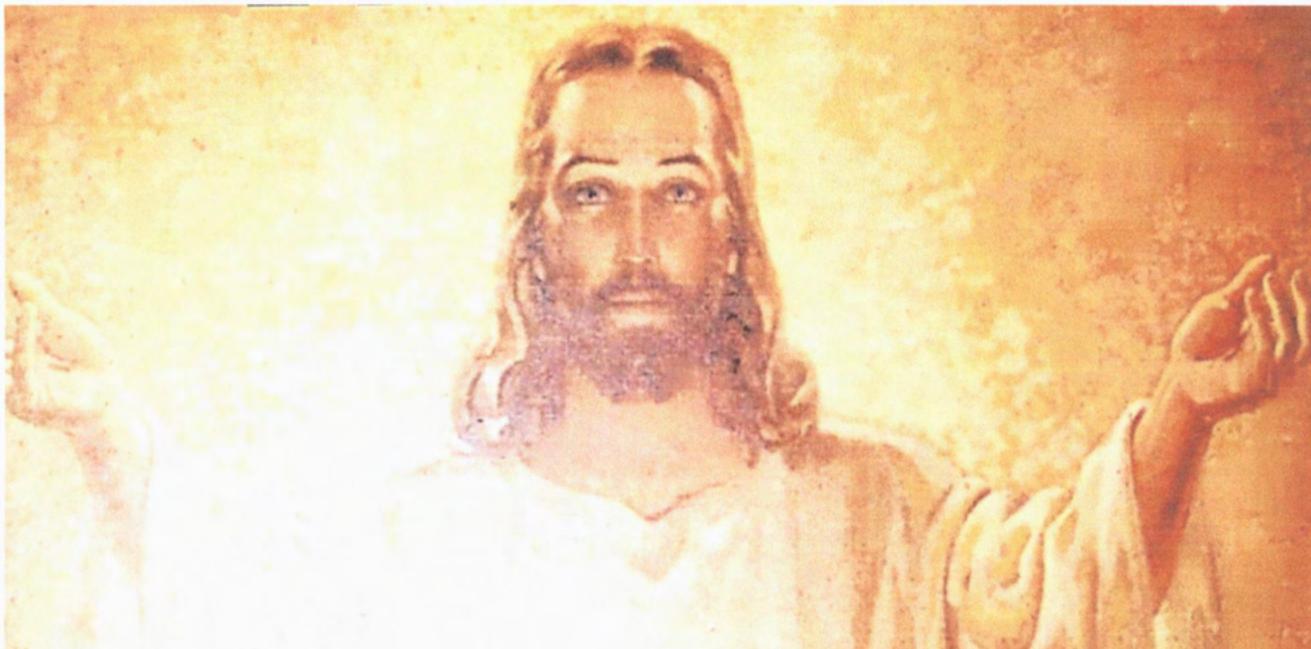
**Young Craig Lee Dunning**  
**Born June 17, 1946**  
**Enlisted US Army mid November 1966.**  
**Advanced from Private (E-1) to Major (O-4) in Vietnam.**  
**Deceased February 20, 2023.**



**Craig Lee Dunning,  
Major US Army (Retired).**

A message from all of us that have come to  
know, and love you.

Life has dealt you a hard life, and you have traveled  
through Hell.



Now you can rest in peace with our Lord,  
Where all is well.

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR  
**CRAIG LEE DUNNING, MAJOR, US ARMY**

March 28, 2023  
10: AM.

Jacksonville National Cemetery  
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville, FL 32218



Many came, and many couldn't be here, but all who knew him were there spiritually, to honor a great soldier.



How do you drape the flag on a closed casket?

It should be so placed that the union (blue field) is at the head, and over the left shoulder, of the deceased who has served the flag in life.





It may be said that the flag embraces the deceased.





Tapa was adopted initially to tell the troops that it was time to turn off the lights and go to sleep.



Put out the lights  
The day is done;  
gone is the sun.

From the lakes, from the hills, from the sky...  
All is well; rest; safely;  
God is nigh.



Today, the 24 mournful notes comprising “Taps” are played to commemorate the memory of the members of all five branches of the Armed Forces: the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard. The sound of the trumpet reaches the depths of the soul and brings a soothing feeling of tranquil peace to all that hear it. “Taps” is an official bugle call of the military. There are no official lyrics because many other lyrics go with them.



Shortly after the song was composed, or revised in 1862, the bugler sounded “Taps” at a funeral; after that, it became associated with a military funeral. After the Civil War, both “Taps” and the firing of the three volleys became part of our military funerals as we know them today.

### The meaning behind each of the thirteen folds

in a properly-folded American flag.

The flag is folded to represent the original thirteen colonies of the United



States. Each fold also carries its meaning. According to the description, some folds symbolize freedom and life, or pay tribute to mothers, fathers, and those who serve in the Armed Forces. When the flag is completely folded and tucked in, it looks like a cocked hat, representing soldiers who served under George Washington, and the sailors and marines who served under John Paul Jones, and the many who have followed in their footsteps.



After the flag has been folded, a member of the Honor Guard will formally present the flag to the family.



*"On behalf of the President of the United States, the United States Army, and a grateful Nation, please accept this flag as a symbol of our appreciation for your loved one's honorable and faithful service".*

In the line of duty, the family receives one flag provided by the VA. If there is no family member to receive the folded flag, a member of the VA will receive it on their behalf.



After the formal ceremony, acknowledgment recognition began. It became apparent that many knew him, but didn't really know him.

He was a Heroes' hero a Lyon among men. He advanced from a Private (E-1) to a Major (O-4) in two years. That was unprecedent and remains so.



He was a Vietnam veteran assigned to the following.



The Big Red One, The 1st Infantry Division. The First Cavalry Airmobile Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade,  
1<sup>st</sup> Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, 1<sup>st</sup> Squad

#### Medals he received

2 Silver Stars



4 Bronze Stars



5 Purple Hearts



National Defense Service Medal



Good Conduct Medal



Vietnam Service Medal



And More

The booklet, *A Hero's Story* was an eye-opener for many at the ceremony.



It didn't take long to realize how great a hero Craig was, yet so humble and caring for his fellow man. He was an honorable man—his love for humankind was unmeasurable, and was held primarily for his companions during his military service.



His humility warmed our hearts and souls, bringing tears to our eyes, as we pray for his smooth transition from this life into the spiritual light of Christ.



In our hearts, we know he is with  
Jesus in Heaven.

We know that Jesus has received  
another great warrior to serve in  
His Spiritual Kingdom.



### **One of Craig's "Band of Brothers."**

He spoke knowingly of the hardships that his friend had endured and survived.

It is not over yet. One thing remains to be done to honor our friend and hero.

**He echoed the thought that all of us had been thinking.**

Craig Lee Dunning, Major US Army, should be granted a Medal of Honor for his service to his country above and beyond the call of duty. He conspicuously distinguished himself time and time again. Craig advanced from a Private to a Major in two years. That is unheard of. He never asks his troops to do anything he didn't do himself. The heroic acts he accomplished were unprecedented, yet he never lost his sense of humor, humility, and unfailing love for his fellow man.

Without question, Craig Lee Dunning deserves the fitting honor of receiving the Medal of Honor posthumously.





## Proclamation of the City of Atlantic Beach

*Honoring the life and heroic service of*  
**Major Craig L. Dunning**

WHEREAS, Craig L. Dunning was born in 1946 and grew up in Virginia. After earning an engineering degree from Virginia Tech, he was drafted by the U.S. Army at age 19. He attended Basic Training at Fort Bragg and reported to Vietnam, where he served from 1966-1968; and

WHEREAS, Dunning was a source of affection and appreciation in the Atlantic Beach community and the Atlantic Beach Police Department. He lived on Seminole Road for decades and lived in nearby Anthem Lakes in his final years. The City's Purple Heart designation was framed around him, and the City of Atlantic Beach along with Jax Vets, Atlantic Beach Police Department, Anthem Lakes, and Angel Bikes gifted him with a recumbent bike in 2019 after he was victimized by a hit-and-run incident on Mayport Road. He passed away on February 20, 2023; and

WHEREAS, in Vietnam, Dunning was assigned to "The Big Red One" First Infantry Division and First Cavalry Airmobile Division. For his acts of bravery and heroism, he was awarded Purple Hearts medals for being wounded as a result of an act of an opposing armed force; Silver Star medals for gallantry in action; and two Bronze Star medals for heroic or meritorious achievement or service in a combat zone. He wrote about his combat experiences in Vietnam, crediting God with saving his life on many occasions; and

WHEREAS, Dunning was promoted to Platoon Leader Sergeant E-7. And, later, after volunteering to be a "tunnel rat", he was promoted to First Lieutenant Platoon Leader, serving in that role during Operation BYRD. He then volunteered to serve an additional year and was promoted to Major O-4. Assigned to a battalion as part of Operation BYRD, efforts were successful to open Highway 1, a vital link to Saigon; and

WHEREAS, as a disabled veteran, Dunning returned from the war and was met by the scorn of many Americans, in spite of valiantly serving his country and trying to help free the South Vietnamese. He suffered from PTSD, had nightmares about seeing his men die, and he did not talk about his service for 45 years upon joining Jax Vets.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that I, Curtis Ford, Mayor of Atlantic Beach, do hereby issue this proclamation expressing heartfelt appreciation for the life and heroic service of Major Craig L. Dunning, and encourage all citizens to join me in bestowing this recognition.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have set my hand and caused the Official Seal of the City of Atlantic Beach to be affixed this 27<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2023.

Curtis Ford, Mayor

